



Raja Prithwi Chand Lal and His Zamindari System in Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur District in West Bengal : During the Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT

The present Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district was a part of undivided Purnea district of Bihar. During the Mughal period, most of the areas of this subdivision were included in Surjapur Pargana and Tajpur Sarkar of Subah of Bengal. Most of the lands of this subdivision were under the Nawab of Khagra Estate(Kishanganj). Babu Dharam Chand Lal and Raja Prithwi Chand Lal bought many lands in this subdivision under the Nawab of Khagra estate. At this time, according to the Permanent Settlement, the revenue of this Pargana was Rs.2,46,226. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal, on the one hand was attracted to various sports, was also involved in philanthropic activities. He gave many lands in this subdivision to small Zamindars return for fixed revenue. Ramganj Zamindari, Bolancha Zamindari, Ladhi Zamindari, Goagaon Zamindari and Bikaur Zamindari were formed based on land given by Raja Prithwi Chand Lal. Also, he built Kacharibari in various parts of this subdivision to collect tax or revenue.

Introduction : The north-eastern part of the undivided Purnea district belonged to the Surjapur pargana. Although, the current Surjapuri language and culture originated much earlier, yet during the Mughal period, Surjapur pargana was formed with the north-eastern part of the undivided Purnea district. A place is named after rulers, population and mythological events etc. This Surjapur Pargana is also named for one of the reasons. But there is no historical evidence. It is not easy to find out where from this 'Surjapur' nomenclature came from. It is known that this area was under the rule of Mithila sometime between



1100-500 BC. This area was ruled by King Videha of Mithila, whose other name was Janaka. "The boundary of Mithila comprises the modern districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran and parts of the districts of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea."¹ During the age of Mahabharata, this Surjapur Pargana was sparsely populated. The Pancha Pandavas spent their exile in this region. "Local tradition still speaks of the struggles and conquests of the Kiratas, and a Kirata(Kiranti) woman from the Morang or Tarai is said to have been the wife of Raja Virat, who, according to legend, gave shelter to Yudhishtira and his four Pandava brothers during their 12 years exile. The site of his fort is still pointed out at Thakurganj in the north of the district."²

This area was ruled by rulers of the Surya dynasty. Before 1545 AD, the area was ruled by Hindu rulers. These Hindu rulers believed in Sanatani Hinduism. It would not be inlogical to say that, the Hindu rulers of this area and the Hindus, who believed in Sanatani Hinduism worshiped the Sun. Even today, many people of Islampur Subdivision do Chhata Puja (worship of the Sun). Also, the region was ruled under Adisura, the first King of Dinajpur. Many people here believe that, the village called 'Surjapur' under Chakulia police station of Islampur Subdivision existed before the formation of Surjapur Pargana during the Mughal period.

The Surjapur pargana was formed in 1545 AD during the Mughal period. Sher Shah, the ruler of the Suri dynasty, defeated the Mughal Emperor Humayun and became the ruler of the Mughal Empire. Emperor Humayun fought with Sher Shah to regain his empire. Then Saiyad Khan Dastur helped Emperor Humayun in this war. As a result, Emperor Humayun gave Surjapur Pargana to Saiyad Khan Dastur. L.S.S.O' Malley mentioned in his Gazetteer -"According to its chronicles, the founder of the family was Saiyad Khan Dastur, who did good service under the Emperor Humayun in the war against Sher Shah and was rewarded, in A.H.962 , i.e., 1545 A D., by the grant of a sanad conferring on him, together with the title of kanungo, the zamindari of Surjyapur, which was formerly held by a Hindu Raja named Sukhdeo."³ The boundaries of this pargana increased and decreased over time. According to Francis Buchanan's account, the Surjapur pargana was formed within 14 and 15 lakhs of bigahs or 5,00000 acres.⁴ On the other hand, L.S.S.O' Malley in his Gazetteer gave the area of Surjapur Pargana as 729(4,66,560 acres) square miles.⁵

In 1770 AD, the British took over the administration of the undivided Purnea district. At this time, the district was formed with undivided Purnea district. Also, undivided Purnea was divided into three Subdivision, viz., (1) Purnea (2) Araria (3) Kishanganj. Kishanganj Subdivision was divided into three Thanas, viz., (1)Bahadurganj(Outpost -Digalbank), (2) Islampur (Outpost - Chopra, Thakurganj),(3)



Kishanganj (Outpost- Goal pokhar) and Purnea Subdivision was also divided into seven Thanas,viz., Gopalpur was one of those seven Thanas (Output - Karandighi).⁶ On 1st November,1956, on the recommendations of the 'State Re-organisation Commission ' this Surjapuri Nations with an area of 759 square miles were included in West Dinajpur district of West Bengal from Purnea district of Bihar. Thakurganj, Islampur, Chopra, Kishanganj, Goalpokhar and Karandighi police stations belonged to undivided Purnea district.⁷ Above mentioned places were included in the boundary of Transferred Area.

Raja Prithwi Chand Lal And His Philanthropic activities : Raja (Title) Prithwi Chand Lal was born on 7th April,1886 AD, in Nazarganj of Purnea city of Bihar. His father was Babu Dharam Chand Lal and his grandfather was Babu Nackched Lal. They were the banker of the Purnea district.⁸ The Raja Prithwi Chand Lal succeeded his father, the Zamindar, Dharam Chand Lal, at the young age of just thirteen, in March 1899 AD. "The son of Nackched Lal, Babu Dharam Chand Lal, steadily added to the property acquired by his father. He purchased Haveli Purnea from Babu Pratap Singha, and it now stands in the name of his wife, Musamat Bhawanbati Chaudrain of Purnea. She and her son, Babu Prithwi Chand Lal Chaudhuri, are now said to be the wealthiest resident Zamindars of the Purnea district. They have acquired this Haveli property, pargana Asja(Tauji No.29), about 5 3/4 annas of pargana Surjyapur."⁹ when the Raja Prithwi Chand Lal was a minor, certain properties were acquired at auction in1900.¹⁰ The Dharampur Estate of the Kishanganj Subdivision was acquired by Babu Nackched Lal Chaudhuri, grandfather of Raja Prithwi Chand Lal. The rent-roll of the estate is nine lakhs, and the revenue demand is a little over four lakhs.¹¹

Raja Prithwi Chand Lal was head of Purnea Polo Club. Also, he was the first Indian member of the Calcutta Rackets Club (1936), it is founded by the British in 1793 AD. Also, he was a promoter of music. Because, he retained Bismillah Khan during the time of his eldest son's marriage to play shehnai and encouraged Bismillah Khan to take up the opportunity. Also, Raja Prithwi chand Lal was an honorary magistrate on the purnea sudder independent bench and a volunteer in the National Bengal Mounted Rifles.

Raja Prithwi Chand Lal did various philanthropic activities. He built Purnea Zilla School and Rani B.P. Choudhrain school and Temples. Also, he contributed to the lady Dufferin Hospital and the Sadar Charitable Hospital in Purnea. He organised the 'Shirua Mela' at Karandighi, a village under Karandighi police station of this subdivision. This fair was organised every year in the first day of Baishakh (Bengali Month).¹² Also, he played an important role in the construction of the 'Ganga-Darjeeling Road'.



Raja Prithwi Chand Lal's Zamindari System in Islampur Subdivision : Before 1545 AD, this area was under a Hindu ruler named Sukhdeo. Afghan Sher Shah deposed the Mughal Emperor Humayun and seized the mughal throne. Then Mughal Emperor Humayun fought with Sher Shah to regain his empire. Then Saiyad Khan Dastur helped Emperor Humayun in this war. As a result, emperor Humayun gave Surjapur Pargana to Saiyad Khan Dastur. L.S.S.O' Malley mentioned in his Gazetteer -"According to its chronicles, the founder of the family was Saiyad Khan Dastur, who did good service under the Emperor Humayun in the war against Sher Shah and was rewarded, in A.H.962, i e., 1545 A.D., by the grant of a sanad conferring on him, together with the title of kanungo, the zamindari of Surjapur, which was formerly held by a Hindu Raja named Sukhdeo."¹³ This Surjapur Pargana was included in Tajpur Sarkar. "From the Aib-i-Akbari it appears that the present district was included in Sarkar Tajpur east of the Mahananda river.¹⁴ After Saiyad Khan Dastur, his son-in-law Saiyad Rai Khan got the Zamindari here. During the reign of Saiyad Fakhruddin Hussain, Surjapur Pargana was included in Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement. "When it was assessed to a revenue of Rs.2,46,226.¹⁵ Fakhruddin had two sons, Didar Hussain and Akbar Hussain. Didar Hussain's clan ruled in Khagra and Akbar Hussain's relatives ruled to Kishanganj. Later, Kishanganj nawabi could not survive for long times. Certain parts of Kishanganj Nawab were bought by Babu Dharam Chand Lal of Nazarganj and his son Raja Prithwi Chand Lal. Besides, there were many small Zamindari System in this area. There were also Kacharibari of Zamindars, Dak Bungalows and Nilkuthi of the British. Peasants used to deposit their tax or revenue in this Kacharibari. "Before the introduction of Permanent Settlement, the Gachabandi System was prevalent in Surjapur pargana. A certain amount of Land was called Gach. The owner of the Gach was called Gachadar."¹⁶

1. Zamindari of Ramganj : The founder of Ramganj Zamindari was Ramranjan Bhagat. Ramranjan Bhagat's natives place was Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh. The name Ramganj comes from his name. He received the Zamindari of Ramganj from the Raja Prithwi Chand Lal of Purnea and Nawab Ata Hussain of Khagra estate.¹⁷ He had several thousand bigahs of land. The Britishers had good relations with the Zamindars of Ramganj. The Britishers used to come to the Puja-Parban of this Zamindar's house.¹⁸ Although Zamindars of Ramganj had good relations with the British, but didn't have good relations with the common peasants. Kgagendranath Mandol (Freedom fighter of Ramganj) saw the oppression of Ramganj Zamindars with his own eyes.¹⁹ This dilapidated Zamindar house still exists today.

2. Zamindari of Bolancha : Zabaher Ali was the founder of Bolancha Zamindari. Bolancha village is 6km away from Islampur city. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal and Nawab Mohiuddin Hussain of Khagra estate



gave him the responsibility of collecting the tax or revenue of the lands of Bhotamari, Shitalgao, Nirbhay Chandi, Chutiakhor, Bolancha, Iluabari, Chapasar, Fulbari etc under the Chopra police station.²⁰ It is said that, Akbar's general Nan Singh once came to the house of Zabaher Ali, the Zamindar of Bolancha, and was very impressed by the hospitality of the people of his house.²¹ After the death of Zabaher Ali, his younger son Akbar Rahman took over the management of this Zamindari. Britishers also used to come to their house.

3. Zamindari of Ladhi : Ladhi Zamindar house was in Ladhi village of Chakulia police station. The founder of the Zamindari was Dwarika Nath Das. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal gave him about 2000 of land in mouzas like Dharampur, Chakulia, Baligara, Bhikharpur, Ladhi , Gerua , Malingaon, Kahata Ghoradappa etc under certain condition.²² Zamindars of Ladhi had Kachharibari in Dharampur and Chakulia village. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal visited at this Zamindar's house many times.

4. Zamindari of Goagaon : Giyasuddin Sarkar was the founder of this Zamindari. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal settled some lands in Goagaon region to him. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal collected an annual revenue of Rs.14,000 from the Giyasuddin Sarkar. Giyasuddin Sarkar had land in different areas of Karandighi, Chakulia and Goalpokhar police station.²³ He appointed 22 Tahsildars to collect the revenue. He also built a Mosque with three domes in 1840 AD. Later Chhipi estate was born from Goagaon estate. Kalimuddin Sarkar was the head of Chhipi estate. He built Chapua Bridge and Bar Library at Kishanganj.²⁴

5. Zamindari of Bikaur : There was a Zamindar in Bikaur of Karandighi police station. The original home of these Zamindars were in Katwa Subdivision of Burdwan district. One of their ancestors was the Nawab of the Queen of Raniganj. Pleased with the influence, prestige and skill of that Nayeb, Raja Prithwi Chand Lal gave him several mouzas of Karandighi police station under certain conditions.²⁵ These lands were spread over Bikaur, Keshabpur, Gaigao, Sabdhan, Bhogdoarin, Garulbhasa, Belbari, Tunibhita, Bhogshala, Swadhinpur, Basudebpur and Narayanpur mouzas. They (Zamindars of Bikaur) did not like the rule and exploitation of the British government at all. They supported India's freedom struggle. Son of this family, Gopal Krishna Ghosh and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose were in contact.²⁶ 'Bukaur post office ' and 'Bukaur M.E. school' were established under the initiative of these Zamindars. Sometimes they collected very little tax from the common peasants. Hence, some called this estate 'Bairagi estate '.



Also, Pakargach village had the Kacharibari of Raja Prithwi chand Lal and Shyamapada Roy, Zamindar of Nandoi village. Raja Prithwi Chand Lal's Kacharibari were scattered in different areas of this subdivision. Such as - Kacharibari of Karandighi, Kacharibari of Rahatpur, Kacharibari of Jagtagaon village and Kacharibari of Debiganj. Common peasants used to deposit tax or revenue in all these Kacharibari. If for some reason a peasants could not pay the tax or revenue, they were brought to Kacharibari and punished. "The Land Revenue Administration Report of 1916-17 had particularly mentioned that absentee Zamindars in Kishanganj Subdivision had developed a continued tendency to dispossess tenants with a view to obtain enhanced rent or realise various customary abwabs. Certain types of criminal offences were extremely common in Purnea district even as late as 1930-40. It was a routine matter for the Landlord or Amlas to send for the recalcitrant tenant and to keep him tied up in front of the kutchery as a public exhibit to terrorise other tenants. The tenants used to be forcibly put into various torturous physical punishment and extraction of thumb impression of the poor tenants on blank paper was a common zulum in Purnea."²⁷ These Kacharibaris became a symbol of peasants oppression. "In the Kishanganj Subdivision the relations between the Landlords and tenants had become extremely strained."²⁸ In 1936, Shyam Singha and Labit Singha of Betbari village in Islampur Subdivision, despite paying their tax or revenue, Nizamuddin of Pattanidar falsely sued them for tax or revenue.²⁹ Many Surjapuri men and women participated in the Tebhaga Movement and they struggled against the baton forces of British police, Zamindars and Jotdars.

Conclusion : By reviewing the various aspects of the present Islampur Subdivision, it can be said that - This subdivision has a distinct history. Most of the Zamindari of the Subdivision were under Raja Prithwi Chand Lal. On the one hand, the name Raja Prithwi Chand Lal has been associated with peasants oppression, on the other hand, it has also been associated with philanthropic activities. Many Zamindars in this area supported the British activities, while several Zamindars opposed it. Many Zamindars of this area supported the Indian Independence Movement and made important contributions. Apart from Raja Prithwi Chand Lal's Zamindari, other Zamindaris were developed in this subdivision.

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